

1967 - May Day Speech, "On the 50th Anniversary of the Russian Revolution"

(to the LSA Forum, Toronto)

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Ross Dowson:

Today, there are of course a great many celebrations being held across the world, as we are holding our meeting here in Toronto, and I think some of you perhaps saw, thanks to modern technological progress, the photos of the celebrations that took place in Petrograd, in the Soviet Union. These of course were massive demonstrations, which involved hundreds of thousands of workers, of technicians, of peasants - the farmers - and of course they paraded before the leadership of the Soviet Union who had organized the demonstrations there with the forces at their disposal.

I think if you saw those demonstrations or if you read the reports of them in the daily press, you would say that these are largely formal ceremonies, tributes to the material progress of the Soviet Union. The demonstrations in the Soviet Union are in a sense a celebration of the transformation of Tsarist Russia which existed before 1917, into the second world power, into modern Russia as we know it today, which is the second world power. In a sense they were celebrations of the transformation of this economy, the Soviet Union, in the face of invasions - two massive foreign invasions - in the face of a civil war, a prolonged and extremely costly civil war, and unparalleled destruction, both human and material destruction which had been the lot of the Soviet people - into a modern industrial nation, which leads the world in space research.

These developments - which these celebrations are - are tributes which have taken place despite the harmful aspects of the experiences of the Soviet bureaucracy, as Khrushchev and his subsequent heirs have testified.

There have also been celebrations in Canada. There was a celebration in Canada just a few days ago by the official friends of the Soviet regime, and in many respects these celebrations - there's another one taking place tonight - these have been, in my opinion, a ritual homage to a revolution which took place 50 years ago, and **far, far** away, in Russia. Another celebration took place in Ottawa the other night, which was picketed by various reactionaries in this country, was the celebration in which the Soviet representatives participated in, along with the avowed and declared opponents of the October Revolution, such as the Honourable Paul Martin (*reaction from the audience*) .

There's another celebration taking place tonight, and while we're deprived of participating in that celebration, it's a celebration that has been called by the Communist Party of Canada, and the speaker will be one of the leaders of the CPC, but we have an idea of the nature of this celebration, from reading the **Canadian Tribune**, which is the organ of the CPC, and particularly the lengthy article by the leader of the CPC William Kashtan. This is a lengthy article which I think all of you should take advantage of and read and examine, and think about a little.

But I want to say a few words about it. It talks about the development of student power in Canada. As you know, on the campuses across the country there is a ferment among the students who are posing the question of having at least some say if not control of the universities, of the educational forums in which they are spending their time, and which they want to see shaped to prepare them to face the new challenges of our society. And so Kashtan talks about the developing moves towards student power, and he says here, we have one of the seeds of an idea - that the working people of our country should have a voice and a say in policy and not be the victims of monopoly policy as they are today.

Canadian Stalinist celebrate their aim for an "anti-monopoly coalition"

And in reading this, I thought what kind of celebration is this, of the October Revolution, when the leaders of a party which calls itself "Communist" talk about the drive of the working people to have a "say," to have a "voice" in what is being determined in this country. A "say" and a share with whom, we might ask. Who are they going to share the power with? So it seems to me that this type of celebration, this type of tipping the hat to the October Revolution, is quite irrelevant, and certainly a denial of the aims of the October Revolution, which didn't talk about a say, which didn't talk about a voice for the working people, but which said in the most strident terms, workers' **power**, workers' control. That is what the declared aim and objective of the October Revolution was.

And then it goes on: it says "sooner or later, this idea of power which today is limited to specific areas will merge in one powerful stream and move in the **direction** of an anti-monopoly coalition" (*chuckles from the audience*) . What can you say about those who would celebrate the October Revolution when they talk in terms of the moves of the working people of this country to have power, when they talk about - as they say - "sooner or later," the idea of workers' power, of workers' participation will "merge in the stream of the direction of an anti-monopoly coalition."

I think tonight we heard from the voice of the October Revolution - what it had to say on such a policy. It wasn't equivocal. It wasn't debateable - what the aims of the October Revolution were. They didn't talk about "sooner or later," they talked about **now** - that was the voice of the October Revolution. They talked about workers' power now, and they didn't talk about "an anti-monopoly coalition." What can you say about a celebration of the October Revolution that talks about "an anti-monopoly coalition?"

The Revolution of October, the revolution which we are here celebrating tonight, made clear its aims and objectives. As a matter of fact, it was ideologically armed and against, and **destroyed** what might be called the "anti-monopoly coalition" that existed in the Soviet Union - a bourgeois-liberal government, the Kerensky government, which was very vividly portrayed before us tonight - that was the aim of the October Revolution. It didn't talk in terms of an "anti-monopoly coalition." As a matter of fact Lenin's strident addresses to the Bolsheviks - as you perhaps know, when he arrived at the Finland Station, he addressed himself to the Bolsheviks, and he challenged them to move out boldly, he challenged them to break from the very concept of dual power, which I would say is perhaps the form of this figurative "anti-monopoly coalition" which William Kashtan talks about.

He (*Lenin*) said "end the concept of dual power," "all power to the working class" -- that was the declared aims and objectives of the October Revolution. So what do we say to a celebration of the October Revolution that talks about something else? Something that **entirely**, the October Revolution itself rejected, fought against and was forced into combat against, and which it overthrew?

And just to continue the quote: he talks about "sooner or later" for the idea of an anti-monopoly coalition - we will move towards that, in the direction of that, I should say, and **towards** - sooner or later - the achievement of socialism in our country, by peaceful means. What do you say of a celebration, which in advance, assures the bourgeoisie, makes a declaration to the Canadian bourgeoisie I presume, that the aims of socialism are going to be achieved by peaceful means, and gives a guarantee in advance, an assurance, to the bourgeoisie that we **reject** any armed struggle, any serious struggle with the bourgeoisie? .

October Revolution made by armed struggle, defended by guerrilla struggle

For the October Revolution, there can be no mistake about that. It was an armed struggle; it was carried out by the Russian workers and peasants, by the sailors - you can see one of the posters here on the side on the panel - was carried out by the sailors of Kronstadt, as an armed struggle. It was carried out and organized and mobilized by the Bolsheviks with full consciousness in this direction. And it was defended, it was defended by armed struggle. You might say that it

was defended by **guerrilla** struggle, in the period of the civil war, when the armies of the intervention - the Canadian army, the Japanese, the Czechs, the British and the American armies of intervention - were beat back by the Soviet working class, organized into the Red Army under the leadership of Trotsky.

It was an armed struggle by the working class that took the power, and it was an armed - a guerrilla struggle - it was war fought on a guerrilla basis, in the trenches by the Soviet workers that established and maintained worker's power in the Soviet Union.

And what can you say today - today - of Vietnam? In the ruthless imperialist interventions against the people, the popular struggle, the revolutionary struggle of the people of Vietnam - what can you say about this elegant speech by William Kashtan of the Communist Party who says "we have gone a long way, a long way from the period when the Tory Canadian government participated with thirteen other countries in a war of intervention" against the then young socialist state by sending Canadian troops to Murmansk as a part of the effort of world imperialism to crush the October Revolution.

How far have we done away from **that** - that situation? How far are we distant from the day when imperialism intervened, arrogantly, ruthlessly, with the most dangerous instruments of destruction, against a popular revolutionary struggle? Against a workers' state? Isn't that what's happening right now - today, in Vietnam? How can one celebrate the October Revolution and spread such deceptions, such fraudulent ideas?

And one last reference to the statement by William Kashtan, head of the party which calls itself "Communist" in celebration of the October Revolution. He said "the first fifty years of the October Revolution, the first fifty years of the struggle of the world working class, have been hard and difficult years, and they have also been joyous years. We believe the next phase of development will be easier - all the more so, if imperialism is curbed and its aims defeated." What can you say about a celebration of the October Revolution which talks about "if imperialism is **curbed**" and if its **"aims are defeated."** The declaration of the October Revolution was the **destruction** of imperialism, the **confrontation** of the world working class with imperialism, and against imperialism.

Of course it "curbed" imperialism, and "it defeated its aims" in 1917; but the next stage of the development of the world working class struggle cannot be visualized by anyone of us here tonight I'm sure unless we not only curb imperialism, and defeat its aims, but remove it from the face of the earth! **That's** the aim of the October Revolution!

The October Revolution destroyed Tsarism, and went on in its course to destroy a bourgeois-democratic government arms in hand, and it raised the banner of worldwide anti-imperialist struggle. It raised the banner of the world revolution. And it consolidated its banner in the formation of the Third International.

So, I would like to say a few words about our celebration. Our celebration - the celebration organized by the League for Socialist Action, a celebration of those who identify themselves with the freedom struggle of the people of Vietnam; the workers of this country who identify themselves with the concept of workers' party through the New Democratic Party - our celebration goes far beyond, far beyond any formal ceremony, to the material progress of the U.S.S.R. That is worth celebrating to be sure - the great material gains of the October Revolution. They have grown from the firm foundations that were laid by the Russian working class in 1917 - that's the source of the great material achievements and material gains of these workers of Russia today. .

The paramount significance of October to all human history

But our celebration goes far beyond that. And I think, and I am sure you will agree, in a totally different spirit, from that which pervades the celebration of the Communist Party of Canada and their counterparts in other sections of the globe; for us, the Russian Revolution is **our** revolution. Our revolution. It's not a revolution in Russia. It took place in Russia, but it was our revolution. Our blood was shed; our ideas were tested, and our viewpoint, our theories proved correct. November 7, 1917 - it sounded the death sentence on the old order of capitalism. The Revolution not only destroyed Tsarism, and I can't help but feel that that's the general picture we are given in most of the orthodox celebrations of the October Revolution, but while it destroyed Tsarism, the next stage is telescoped if not ignored. It went further. It conquered over the bourgeois-democratic regime that took the place of Tsarism, and which wanted to carry on the dirty work of Tsarism, that wanted to sustain the war effort, that wanted to deprive the peasantry of the land, and the workers of any power in Russian society.

The Revolution went forward - went forward. The Revolution in Russia, in 1917, moved forward in permanence - it went from the revolution against Tsarism, against feudalism, but it went on a non-stop basis. There was a short lull, from February to October; then the revolution was permanent, the workers went forward, destroyed the feudal oligarchy; they destroyed the "gorillas," if I may say so, and they established socialist power - workers power in Russia. And the October Revolution, I think we can say, was the true beginning of human history - it was the **conscious** intervention of the working class in the historic process. The workers that participated in the great social changes prior to the October Revolution - they were the ones who led the struggles in the streets of Paris in 1789 - the *sans culottes* - they were the ones who sacrificed, who bled - but the revolution was taken away from them, and a new class imposed its rule - the capitalist class.

But in Russia, the struggle of the workers was not an episode. It wasn't a move-out by the working class, but it was consolidated and the working class moved right into the scheme of things, and they took it upon themselves to shape society to their needs and to their wants, to their aspirations. They decided to remake it consciously, not just clear away the old, as they had been utilized in previous historic struggles, but to plan a **new** society, a **socialist** society. The workers of Russia proved that it is possible for the working class everywhere to take the power; they proved that the working class are capable of forging the necessary instrument, the revolutionary vanguard **party**, to take the power - that's what the October Revolution proved.

At the same time as the workers proved this, their own experiences, the Russian workers and peasantry took the power in October, in Russia, at the same time as they announced, as they tolled the death-knell of Tsarism, of Kerenskyism, of bourgeois democracy in their own country, they announced the beginning of a new order of world socialism.

I know when I came to the socialist movement in this country, the October Revolution had a great impact on me. I was sceptical about the possibilities of building socialism in this country, like the workers in general are across this country - sceptical - it sounded like a good idea. I was impressed by the explanation of the historic process as developed by Marx and by Engels, and by Lenin and by Trotsky - extremely impressed, but I was sceptical. But the October Revolution settled my mind, and I think we can say it settled the mind of subsequent generations, not only important forces in my generation, but subsequent generations. It meant to me, when I saw the Russian workers could do it; it posed to me the question: Why can't we do it? What have the Russian workers got that we haven't got? Why can't we do it if the Russian workers can do it? .

Trotsky: "Soviet Russia is not a country - it's a strike"

And I think the essence of our celebration tonight is contained in a few words, that James P. Cannon, one of the founders of the Communist Party of the United States and subsequently one of the founders of the Trotskyist movement in the United States, reports, following a visit with Leon Trotsky back in the '20s when he was a representative of the Communist Party of the United States at one of the congresses in the Soviet Union. And he reports to the workers of America in one of his speeches what Trotsky said to him. He said "After all, Soviet Russia is not a country; Soviet Russia is part of the world labor movement. Soviet Russia is a strike. It's not a **country** it's a **strike**. The greatest strike in all history." Trotsky said: go back and tell the workers of America, that when the working class of Europe and America join that strike it will be the end of capitalism.

I think we should say a few words more about the situation that confronts us, this year - on the 50th Anniversary of the great October Revolution. I don't think we can so placidly ignore the confrontation that exists between most of humanity and still dominant imperialism, as William Kashtan suggests, and as Mao Tse-tung has suggested in many of his writings. I don't think we can ignore this confrontation - this confrontation against most of humanity with the still dominant imperialism in the shape of American imperialism. It is true of course that imperialist domination has been narrowed considerably since 1917. The October Revolution and its aftermath wrenched one-third of the world's land area from the imperialists' grasp, and it subsequently wrenched one-third of the world's population from the imperialist grasp.

But the imperialists have established certain compensations. They have learned a thing or two about fighting against revolutions, since their armies of intervention (*against the newborn Soviet state -ed.*) in 1917 and the debacle which confronted them. And they have other compensations; one of them being the most deadly instruments of mass destruction the human mind can envisage. And they have developed even more subtle measures such as many of the

African revolutionaries have experienced - to demoralize and neutralize their opponents. To say, as the October Revolution has said, and as we say as partisans of the October Revolution, that imperialism **won't win**, that the workers **will win** this titanic struggle which we are now in the process of seeing unfolding on an international scale. It doesn't mean the defeat of imperialism by us, won't be other than extremely costly. Just a few weeks ago all of us were shocked to learn of the death of Che Guevara, the great revolutionary martyr of the Latin American struggle - and there will be **more** Che Guevaras, we can be sure of that.

We must celebrate the October Revolution in a correct, an honest and a fearless appreciation of things as they are. We must appreciate the actual world battleground, and that's what we're involved in; that's what's before us; in which the gains of the revolution are not the smallest stakes by any means. The Bolshevik leaders - Lenin, Trotsky, Bukharin, Zinoviev and Radek - that great galaxy of intellectuals, of theoreticians and of fighters on the part of the world working class - they were of a different calibre than the leaders of the Communist Party today, you can be sure. They were revolutionaries, that's what they were. And they had no illusions. And they didn't foster any illusions among the working class.

Permanent revolution or permanent slaughter

They said that armed revolt is the path to power of the working class, and they took the responsibility to lead the armed workers and peasants to establish that power - they took that responsibility. And they told the working class in no uncertain terms that the revolution has to be **permanent**, it has to be world-wide; has to spread outside the borders of Russia, outside the borders of the Soviet Union, or we're going to have permanent slaughter. And that prediction of the Bolsheviks, which they made at the height of their power, and with great anticipations that were released by the seizure of power in November 1917, that prediction of permanent revolution or permanent slaughter has been borne out.

We're having to pay a heavy price, the world working class movement, since 1917, over the past fifty years, for the betrayals of the bureaucracy that have usurped the October Revolution - and their counterparts in the West, including the Tim Bucks and the William Kashtans. We're having to pay for that - that concept, that illusion, that accommodation with imperialism; that concept of accommodation with capitalism.

So I would like to say there are two aspects to the October Revolution which we should think about, tonight. When we think about the great October Revolution, when we think of the inspiration and the challenge of the October Revolution, we should think about the very real and active participation on our part, in the confrontation of US imperialism with the Vietnamese popular revolutionary struggle. And it is indeed gratifying to see so many activists here tonight - activists in the struggle in defence of the right of the Vietnamese people for self-determination. The struggle in Vietnam is paying a high price for the failure of the Soviet bureaucracy to solidarize themselves without any hesitation or equivocation with the Chinese - they're paying a heavy price for that. Stalin's errors, Brezhnev's, Kosygin's - myopic and conservative (*policies*) - they constitute a real source of present danger to the defence of the October Revolution.

The Soviet leadership's intervention in the world political arena - I think it must be clear to all of us now, as we survey the Spanish experience, for instance in the 30s, and as we survey the Arab-Israeli experience a short while ago, and as we look at the situation in Vietnam - their intervention in the world political arena is not intended to ensure the **victory** of the workers' struggles anywhere. Everywhere, including Vietnam, their intervention is designed to induce, to encourage imperialism to draw back, to the extent required to undertake negotiations, in accord with the illusory concept of peaceful co-existence. The Soviet bureaucracy doesn't push for victory in Vietnam, but for **peace** in Vietnam, and that's an extension of the theory of "socialism in one country."

The conflict between the Soviet Union, between the first workers' state and the imperialist powers, was **irreconcilable** and remains irreconcilable - it's a conflict between two social systems; and one or the other must prevail. That was the view of Lenin, and I believe that concept has been borne out to the hilt - that one or the other must prevail. And whoever preaches trust in the American imperialists - I was using the term "Anglo-American imperialists" and that's what Lenin talked about - whoever preaches trust in the American imperialists and their stooges - who suggests we can have any confidence in the Canadian ruling class - in the Paul Martins, in the Gordons, not to speak of the Pearsons - he's a traitor to the Soviet Union, he's a traitor to the popular struggles, the revolutionary struggles that are taking place across the world, and he's a traitor to the Soviet Union, and to the defence of the workers' state formed by October.

And when we think about the celebrations of the October Revolution tonight, we can take great comfort, and great confidence, and find inspiration in the growth of the anti-war movement across the globe; the growth of the anti-war movement in the United States; the growth of the anti-war movement in Canada - in Toronto, where just a few weeks ago we witnessed the most massive demonstrations I think that ever took place in the city of Toronto, against the war in Vietnam, in solidarity with the right of the people of Vietnam to determine their own fate.

The October Revolution lives in Cuba

I think also - I know my time is being very rapidly used up - I think we should say a few words about another development which certainly should be noted, and which is certainly worthy of much more attention than I am going to give it tonight. We have all been partisans of the Cuban Revolution. We've all committed ourselves to defend the Cuban Revolution, and when I look around me I see before me persons who have been on the picket lines, who have defended the Cuban Revolution at various hours of great peril. The Cuban Revolution has been a great inspiration to the advanced elements of the working class of this country, and we look upon it - we surely must look upon it - as the first real **extension** of the October Revolution, that breathes the great liberatory spirit of the October Revolution.

And even more important today than the actual revolution itself, and the achievements that have been racked up, on this tiny island ninety miles off the coast of the United States, we should give some attention to the Organization of Latin American Solidarity - the conference that took place in Havana just a month or so ago. This is indeed a most important conference, that took place. And I hope tonight before you leave, you will take advantage of the fact that we have the basic documents, back for sale at the literature desk. I think that OLAS, the Cubans in harmony with the vanguard elements in Latin America, are acting in the great spirit of the October Revolution.

The OLAS conference in Havana just last month, opened up new and promising perspectives for the revolution, and it marked a great advance for the Latin American vanguard. The Cuban Revolution is now in a better position to **fully** carry forward its identity with the Latin American Revolution. What are the conclusions of the OLAS conference? The conclusions were: One, the struggle must be conducted on a continental scale - that's the spirit of the October Revolution - the struggles of the people of Cuba must be carried on **positively, full committed**, on the Latin American continental scale.

What was another conclusion? That there is no road open, due to the policy of American imperialism in its support of the military oligarchy, but of armed struggle. There is no alternative but armed struggle; and furthermore, that the objective of this struggle - the objective is nothing more or less than the socialist victory throughout Latin America. And of those two basic, epochal, decisions - fully in the spirit of the October Revolution - of these decisions being made now, the decision to build the vanguard against peaceful co-existence and class collaborationist policies, looks much easier and much more promising.

And the Cuban Revolution - and it was the main voice at the OLAS conference - has widened the perspective of this outlook, and is a source of great satisfaction; I am sure with all of you to note that the Cuban Revolution made it as one of its primary points, to spell out in the most specific way, the declaration and appeal of Che Guevara: "Make two, three, **many** Vietnams" - that was the decision of the OLAS conference. It emphasized in an extremely sharp and very vigorous way, a full and absolute identity with the Vietnamese revolutionary forces - that's the October Revolution spirit. It also identified itself with the great revolutionary upsurges taking place in the United States, as it has never before. It identified itself by giving great attention to, by following through in its press, inviting the special guest Stokely Carmichael, to participate in its sessions, and there could be no mistaking that with Stokely Carmichael, there was the voice of the Black Power struggle in the United States. And that too was the voice of the October Revolution. Its incidental that that voice was expressed in opposition to those parties which are the sponsored parties and the apologists for the Soviet bureaucracy.

Sinyavski, Daniel, Bukovsky, Galanskov, Ginsberg: fighters for soviet democracy

And there is one other aspect of the October Revolution that I think we should take the time at our disposal to pay some attention to. I think we should make an appreciation of the increased vigor of the struggle in the USSR itself, and in the

workers' states, against the bureaucratic regimes that exist on top of the states formed by the October Revolution. To be sure, the Soviet economy is dynamic, Soviet society is dynamic. The contradiction between the dynamic forces of Soviet society and its leadership are becoming more and more flagrant, precisely because of the economic development that has now reached a very high level. There is a rising pressure taking place among the Soviet youth and among Soviet intellectuals, to bring the bureaucracy to account.

With the downgrading of Stalin, with the revelations by Khrushchev, of the crimes of the 30s against the cadre - Lenin's cadre - the cadre that carried out the Revolution - there has been great talk about reforms and concessions. And of course we have not been ones to minimize the recent reforms and concessions, but the reforms have had less and less results. The people in Soviet society have no independent political organs at their disposal; they are beginning to express themselves in circles where ideas are dealt with daily, among the intelligentsia, against the regime that exists over there. I would think that we would celebrate the October Revolution with expressions of solidarity with Sinyavsky and Daniel, who, to the scandal of world public opinion I'm sure, were not let in on the amnesty - persons who have committed no crime against Soviet society - this powerful, developed Soviet society that should have no fear of criticism. Sinyavski and Daniel are now languishing in prison for five to seven years and were not given any amnesty by the Soviet regime.

I think we would also express our solidarity with Bukovsky, who participated in demonstrations, in protest against the arrest of the editors of **Phoenix 66**, a journal of the radical and developing intelligentsia among the students. We really express our solidarity with the Phoenix editors, Galanskov and Ginsberg - there was no amnesty for them, they are charged with promoting anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda. That's what the Soviet bureaucracy stigmatizes - the honest critics, the honest positive elements in Soviet society who want to see established some elementary forms of democratic participation in the decisions in the development of their society.

I think we would pay some attention to this developing upsurge that's taking place not only within the borders of the Soviet Union, but in Poland, in Czechoslovakia. This upsurge that is developing, this will smash - in my opinion - not only the Soviet bureaucracy, but it will smash the domination of world imperialism over the minds of important sectors of the world's population. It will remove the taint of Stalinism that discredits the great October Revolution in the West, and I think that all of us here in Canada can't help but be aware of this great difficulty that stands in the way before us, of popularizing the liberatory concepts of the October Revolution - and **our** revolution in this country. And I think that the success of those struggles in the Soviet Union - to establish genuine proletarian democracy, workers' control and workers' participation - in the spirit of the seizure of power of October 1917 - that this will remove this taint that stands between us, as revolutionary defenders of the October Revolution, and those who want to extend its great cause - and the working class of this country.

It will destroy the treacherous influence of the labor bureaucracy in this country, who have deluded the workers of this country, who have attempted to convince them, and not without some success, that this system for **all** its faults, for **all** its evils, for its closures of Dosco plants, in instability and insecurity, is some kind of tolerable system. I think and suspect that this struggle will eliminate that power. The success of this struggle will forge a great alliance between the Soviet workers, peasants and farmers, and the majority of mankind - which was the aim of the October Revolution.

So I would like to end my comments: that the big task before us, today, in the spirit of the October Revolution, is to gather together the forces to forge the revolutionary vanguard, a type of vanguard that made the October Revolution the great success that it was. And I close with a declaration:

Long Live the Russian Revolution! May there be two, three, many Che Guevaras! Long Live the party of the World Revolution - the Fourth International. And I will say again: Long Live the Russian Revolution - Long Live the League for Socialist Action, La Ligue Socialiste Ouvriere, the Young Socialists and La Ligue des Jeunes Socialistes!

(Extended applause)
